

BRIEFING INFORMATION ON
ENVIRONMENTAL HYPERSENSITIVITY

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Chris Brown

Background

- Environmental hypersensitivity is a disorder involving multiple sensitivities to a wide range of foods and chemicals in the environment at levels generally tolerated by the majority. The immune system is often but not always involved and additional symptoms may be manifested directly on the nervous and/or other bodily systems.
- Due to the difficulties of diagnosis and identification of the causes, as well as the non-specific nature of many of the symptoms, there has been much controversy in medical circles over whether the illness is in fact a real disease. Some practitioners have ascribed symptoms to psychosomatic causes.
- In Canada, medical questions to do with diagnosis, treatment and associated costs of illness are clearly under provincial jurisdiction. The Province of Ontario has dealt with the issue by appointing the Thomson Committee to investigate and make recommendations. The Thomson Report was released in December 1985 and a second committee chaired by Dr. B. Zimmerman has reviewed the recommendations and released its report on December 19, 1986.
- Both the Thomson Report and the Zimmerman Review reported that, although there was debate as to the nature, diagnosis, causes and prevalence of the illness, there was no doubt that some people suffered illnesses ranging from mild discomfort to severe disability. The Ontario government has, therefore, called for research proposals on prevalence of the disease and for controlled studies on appropriate methods for diagnosis and treatment.

Relevant Factors

- The Minister of National Health and Welfare has received at least six letters seeking support concerning hypersensitivity from one correspondent, Mr. Chris Brown, as well as about ten letters by the same correspondent referred from other federal Ministers.

Departmental Position

- The Minister has indicated that, while he is sympathetic to the cause of those with environmental hypersensitivity, the area is largely under the jurisdiction of the provinces. However, the mandate of the Department of National Health and Welfare also includes responsibilities for the control of chemicals in food, air and water. The Minister has also outlined our commitment to programmes in areas concerned with pollution abatement.

Mrs. Grace Wood (957-1503)
Health Protection Branch
January 12, 1987: 4:00 p.m.

(Health + Welfare)

note date!